

Open Letter to Church Board

Date: November 3, 2014

To: Church Board:

Jimmye Saldivar, Chairman
Don Whitley, Secretary
Barb Scantlin, Elder Chair

Katie Spencer, V. Chair
Dorene Drake, Treasurer
Pat Whitley, Deacons

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Houston, Texas 77018-1918

From: Charlie Dean, church member

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am responding to the Board's letter dated October 13, 2013. The letter of October 13, 2013 couches a digital library as two different projects: **(1) digitalizing** our archived records and **(2) developing** a procedure to facilitate **immediate digital access**. These are not "two vastly different projects," but are in fact two parts of a larger workflow. It would be selfish to digitize records, and then not make them easily available to everyone. The Board has made **no progress in over a year** (that I have seen) for a plan, or procedure, or Standard Operating Procedure for approaching this matter.

As for the Board's distinction of **current records** and **archived records**, they are digitized the same way. If you were to call everything after 2010 "current records" and everything before 2010 "archived records," it would make no difference in how they are digitized or otherwise treated for making them available online. **The Board fails to comprehend basic concepts.**

The Board's letter of October 13, 2013 points out that Board Meeting documents consists of various committee and Officer **reports**, meeting **agenda**, **sign-in** sheet, **minutes** from the previous board meeting, and **other** documentation submitted during the course of the meeting. I found this helpful for assigning metadata. The suggestion about a file naming convention was helpful. Thanks.

The Board has made **no progress in over a year** on locating church documents on people's personal computers. The Board has made **no progress in over a year** on going to any source, or asking the Officer or Committee Chair that originally produced documents to provide any explanation.

The Board has made **no progress in over a year** on drawing up a definitive plan or agreement among its members, or any other group, regarding any digitization effort. The Board's digitization effort is **no further along** than it was at the time of the letter of October 13, 2013 **over a year ago**.

The Board's letter of October 13, 2013 poses some questions:

- Where will the documents be kept?
- What is to be included in each document package?
- What will the digital format be?
- What will the naming convention be?
- What will the actual process be for digitalizing the records?
- How will they be made both accessible and secure?
- Who will have the ongoing responsibility for updating and accessing them?
- What will be done with the hard copy documents?

The Board has made **no progress in over a year** at answering these questions.

The Board's letter of October 13, 2013 states that "we should table the idea of digitalizing our current and active records and until we have a permanent SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) perfected and in place for our archived records." It appears that the Board has tabled the idea and has taken **no further action for over a year**.

The Board's letter of October 13, 2013 states that "we do not have the **facility** or **wherewithal** to securely store the official documents online for access from the internet." Actually the **facility** for doing this has been available for over a decade. **Over a year later** the Board has made **no progress**.

A church member could get permission to look at a public document, set a time for this, and go with someone and look. For decades the church's corporate documents have been unavailable, **absent an embarrassing, intimidating, and time-consuming ordeal**. Some leaders have cited **privacy** and **security** concerns. However, putting nonexempt documents online is not a compromise of **privacy**, as all this material is already public. Sharing the record online makes is very **secure**. Online access can be done without the worry of destruction, loss, corruption, spoliation, damage, or compromise to the integrity of the original documents. It is a win-win situation. **Yet, the Board's progress remains nill.**

Meanwhile the congregation has been prodded to give “**tithes and offerings**” to finance a church that continues, through corporate fiat, not to have the public (nonexempt) record reasonably available. **This is inappropriate in the 21st Century.** Furthermore nowadays, online records can be accessed **anonymously**; in other words, the user’s personally identifiable information would not be publicly unknown. Church leaders should not be able to monitor members of their flock who decide to peruse the church’s public record.

Information is power. It is no secret that the ability to effect and persuade is made easier by the control of information. There is no good motive for darkening a congregation’s power by the shadow of backwoods ignorance. This kind of persuasion is reminiscent of the mentality of some southern states in the latter half of the 1800s. Perhaps a spiritual of that era should be revised for the Twenty-First Century.

Spiritual From Latter 1800s Improvised For 2014

Wendin’ my way to de old corncrib.
Still no books is in my hand.
Had to cross de lonesome valley.
But brother, one more river if I can.

No sun to burn, no hard trials.
Dere ain’t no whips a-crackin’.
But homin’ an’ a-longin’ – eyes a dim.
Der digital information is a-lackin’.



The Board’s letter of October 13, 2013 states that “we are all, as a congregation, comfortable with our current level of access to those documents.” Members of OCC are capable of deciding for themselves how comfortable they are. Sadly, the decision about one’s comfort level concerning “our current level of access” to digital information has been, through corporate fiat, **removed from the choices that each church member should have.**

All members have an absolute right to access all nonexempt (public) records in whatever form they exist and to make copies or digitize them. The Board has advanced no theological interpretation, or any interpretation of OCC’s Bylaws to support any censorship. It is hard to imagine a reasonable argument that opposes unrestricted access to nonexempt church documents. **One could hardly argue in favor of a higher degree of ignorance.**

Our church cannot respond appropriately to its mission or purpose if we allow our system to impede what goes into the corporate record or what may come from it. It is inappropriate to have a **vetting process** that impedes unpopular topics from finding their way into the record, or coming from the record. This goes to the heart, the very essence, of why we have a corporate record. A church member, no matter how unpopular the topic of his concern, should be able to communicate appropriately with the Board and receive an appropriate response, and this should be appropriately documented in the record. **Personal biases and prejudices should play not part.**

It is hard to imagine how keeping OCC's public record difficult for members to access promotes unity among the congregation. It would be difficult to argue that doing this would be necessary for any particular moral instruction, or in any way necessary for the accomplishment of OCC's purpose. **While some individuals might have an interest in being a gatekeeper of information and ideas, the Board has no interest in it.** An online corporate library would let leaders know that others can anonymously observe the record and see how the Board has dealt with (or neglected) certain matters. An online corporate library would **promote accountability.**

The Board is not (at least in theory) outside the authority of the Bylaws. The present governance model is inconsistent with OCC's purpose. **We have good, dedicated people on the Board.** As problems with the Board have persisted for so long, one logical explanation is that our leaders are working in a flawed system. Somehow, the leaders must muster up enough initiative to improve the system. **We all (officers and non-officers) need to work on this together.**

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